

MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION

Work Session on the Comprehensive Plan Review – January 12, 2011

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held a special work session to discuss the Comprehensive Plan Review on Wednesday, January 12, 2011, at 8:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, at 409 South Main Street.

Commissioners present: Charlie Chenault; Muawia Da'Mes; Judith Dilts; Deb Fitzgerald; and Bill Jones.

Commissioners absent: Alan Finks and Henry Way

Also present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Adam Fletcher, City Planner; Alison Banks, Planner.

Mr. Fletcher said the focus this month was to review the Executive Summary, Chapter One, and Chapter Two, as well as collectively look at the Comprehensive Plan as a whole and see if there were any big issues that we want to amend before the public input phase. Are there any thoughts about the Executive Summary or Chapters One and Two?

Mrs. Fitzgerald said she had one “nit-picky” thing in the first page of Chapter Two, under the Vision Statement. Those paragraphs talk about how the City of Harrisonburg will do something, except for the paragraph that says “What is such a place” the City is. I do not know if it even needs to be changed, if we all agree it reads fine we should leave it.

Dr. Dilts said does it not describe how you would define what is such a place? So, it is not saying what Harrisonburg will be, it is defining what it looks like if citizens are inspired to work together to create this great place.

It was agreed to leave the wording as it is in the Vision Statement currently.

Dr. Dilts said in Chapter Three, on the numbers that are given for the population, is that full time residents? Do you include the students? If so, that makes me wonder about some of the conclusions that you come to about poverty level. I wonder if there is a way to tease out the racial or ethnic grouping for poverty the same as you tease out the percentage for age bracket for poverty.

Mr. Fletcher said it may be above our expertise to do that. We did not come up with these numbers and I do not know if it is possible to do that.

Dr. Dilts said there are two things I am asking. One – it is unclear to me whether it is fair to include the students in some of the conclusions that you make, because the students, I assume, are not full time residents. Secondly, the other issue is if you are really going to discuss poverty level, then at that point perhaps you should remove the students and ask do we have a disproportionate level of permanent residents at the poverty level.

Mrs. Turner said the poverty could be broken out by the racial group and perhaps the ethnicity too.

Planning Commission agreed that a breakdown of the racial and ethnic poverty levels might be helpful to look at.

Mr. Fletcher said he would get that information together and forward it to each member. Also in front of you are changes to Chapter 11, with some changes to the Master Transportation Table 11-1, the difference being we have provided estimates for all the improvements. There are also language and data changes made throughout the chapter. The maps are all updated.

There were no questions or concerns regarding the changes to Chapter 11.

Mr. Fletcher said there is a change that has been brought forward from Whitesel Brothers, near the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Garbers Church Road desiring to change their land use designation from Low Density Mixed Residential to Commercial. This would more closely match what the use of the property is, and because it is a split zoned parcel with the County, it would more closely match the County use and land use designation of Commercial. Staff discussed this and thought it made sense to change not just this parcel, but the entire Low Density Mixed Residential designation along the southern side of Erickson Avenue to the western City limits – all to the Commercial designation.

Planning Commission was in agreement with the recommended change to the Land Use Guide for this area of Erickson Avenue.

Mr. Fletcher said we need to discuss scheduling for public review/input and a public hearing. At the regular Planning Commission meeting in March the consultants that are working with us on our Urban Development Area will be here to review the recommendations with you of what the Urban Development Area should be and what needs to be included in the Comprehensive Plan as required by State Code. By that time we should have what we would consider the completed draft of the Comprehensive Plan that we feel would be ready for public input. I have reserved the Simms Auditorium on Wednesday, March 23 to have an open house type of informal input session. If all goes well, we should be able to go to public hearing in April and on to Council in May. My question is do we want to do a public hearing at our regular meeting, or do we want to schedule a separate meeting?

Planning Commission agreed the time for the public input should be between 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and that it was best to have the public hearing at the regular meeting in April.

With no further comments the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Chairman William L. Jones, Jr.

Secretary, Alison Banks